Praying our Critical Concerns

Welcome

Leader: O God of Compassion, bless us with an awareness of your presence with us as we gather together in this space.

All: O God of Compassion, we are grateful for your presence and ask that we be open and receptive to your call regarding the concerns of Violence, Immigration, Health Care and the Environment, which we bring before you during this time of prayer together.

Reading: From the Gospel of Matthew
"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and visit you?’"
And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

**Time for Reflection** – Let us reflect on our current situation in the country and world and be inspired by the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* of Pope Francis who challenges, encourages and inspires us:

- [we] all need... an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ becomes evident in our relationship with the world around us. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.

(moment of reflection)

- There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our
fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded.

(moment of reflection)

- Finally, the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the (nation) state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.

(moment of reflection)

**Intercessions for our Concerns Based on the Prayer of Pope Francis**

Leader: All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect the life and beauty of Earth.
All: God of Mercy, hear us.

Leader: Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, those who are immigrants and those who are refugees. They are precious in your eyes may they be precious to us all.
All: God of Mercy, hear us.
Leader: Bring healing to our lives, and all those seeking fullness of life and health with us, that we may sow caring, generosity, and concern. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.
All: God of Mercy, hear us.

Leader: Teach us to discover the worth of each person, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. May we all live lives of active non-violence in peace and joy.
All: God of Mercy, hear us.

Leader: We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and solidarity.

Leader: Let us offer each other a sign of peace and encouragement.

Closing Song: Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
Welcome/Introduction

Leader: In the name of the God of peace, the nonviolent Jesus, and the Holy Spirit of love we welcome you to this prayer service.

Let's begin by taking a moment and turning to those around us and introducing ourselves….

I invite you to take a deep breath and relax; notice how you are feeling today. Enter the presence of the God of peace who loves you infinitely, unconditionally. I invite you to welcome the risen, nonviolent Jesus into our community of peace and into our hearts, and to breathe in his Holy Spirit of peace and nonviolence.

Let us give thanks for all the blessings of love and peace that we have received throughout our lives by the God of love and peace. Let us ask God to forgive us for all the ways we have rejected those blessings of love and peace, all the ways we have chosen violence instead of nonviolence, all the ways we have hurt others and supported the culture of violence and war. Let us ask of our violence and ask for the grace to become people of Gospel nonviolence. (Moment of Silence)

Reading: What is Nonviolence?

Voice 1: What is nonviolence?

Voice 2: It is a strategy for social change that rejects violence.

Voice 3: It is a philosophy of active peacemaking.

Voice 2: It is a spiritual discipline.

Voice 2: It is a pragmatic choice based on what works.

Voice 2: It is an active response to violence.
Voice 3: It is a force more powerful than violence. (pause)

Voice 1: Why are we talking about nonviolence during a prayer service?

Voice 3: Because God’s wishes peace for us.
Voice 2: Because God calls us to turn swords into ploughshares.
Voice 3: Because God is the source of power.
Voice 2: Because God is the source of love.
Voice 3: Because God is love. (pause)

Voice 1: What did Jesus say about nonviolence?

Voice 2: Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”
Voice 3: Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”
Voice 2: Jesus said, “Do not be afraid.”
Voice 3: Jesus said, “Put down your sword.”
Voice 2: Jesus said, “Turn the other cheek and go the second mile.”
Voice 3: Jesus said, “Love your enemies.” (pause)

Voice 1: How do Christians walk the talk of nonviolence in everyday life?

Voice 2: By working for justice.
Voice 3: By trusting in God rather than trusting in weapons.
Voice 2: By rehearsing creative and disarming ways of responding to a crisis.
Voice 3: By actively and publicly resisting war.
Voice 2: By building relationships with those who are supposed to be enemies.

Voice 3: By training for love. (pause)

**Voice 1: Don’t people already know enough about love?**

Voice 2: The nonviolent love of Christ surpasses knowledge.

Voice 1: Does that mean people will never really understand nonviolence?

Voice 2: It means that nonviolence is rooted in the mind, but also in the heart. (pause)

**Voice 1: What is nonviolence?**

Voice 2: The way of Jesus.

Voice 3: A force more powerful than violence.

Voice 2: The way of love.

**PERIOD OF REFLECTION**

**Intercessory Prayers for Nonviolence**

**Leader**: Please respond, "God of Peace, hear our prayer."

* That we might become people of Gospel nonviolence, who allow God to disarm our hearts of the violence within us, that we might be nonviolent to ourselves and to every person we meet for the rest of our lives, we pray:

"God of Peace, hear our prayer."

* That we might practice nonviolence as Jesus did, come to understand his creative nonviolence, and obey his commandments of nonviolence: "put down our sword," "be as compassionate as God," and "love your enemies," we pray:
"God of Peace, hear our prayer."

* That we might come to know and worship God as a God of peace and nonviolence, who "makes the sun rise on the good and the bad, and causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust," that we might become peacemakers who help end war and create a culture of nonviolence, and so, fulfill our vocations to be the beloved sons and daughters of the God of peace, we pray:

"God of Peace, hear our prayer."

* For the church, that it might be a global community of Gospel nonviolence, that it might never bless violence or justify war again, that it might support and bless nonviolent campaigns for justice and peace, and that it might always teach, practice and model the nonviolence of Jesus, we pray:

"God of Peace, hear our prayer."

* For an end to war, poverty, starvation, racism, sexism, executions, torture, abortion, nuclear weapons, global warming and violence of every kind, we pray:

"God of Peace, hear our prayer."

* For the coming of a new generation of peacemakers, for new teachers, prophets, apostles, champions and saints of Gospel nonviolence, who will help the world turn from violence to nonviolence, who will lead us to reject war and nuclear weapons, reconcile with one another and create new culture of peace and nonviolence, we pray:

"God of Peace, hear our prayer."

* Please add your own petitions [either in silence, or out loud].
Leader: God of peace, thank you for hearing our prayers, all the prayers in our hearts and all the prayers of the whole human race, and we offer them in the name of the nonviolent Jesus. AMEN.

A Pledge of nonviolence
Leader: I invite all those gathered here to try and practice nonviolence as expressed in our Critical Concern:

All: As members of the Mercy Community, we Confirm that we are committed to “work for peace through prayer, education, personal and communal practices of nonviolence, and legislative advocacy to reduce armed conflicts, gun violence and human rights abuses. (Sisters of Mercy of the Americas)

Closing prayer
Leader: O God, of Mercy and Compassion, open our heart to your grace.

We ask You to: Bless us with courage to embrace nonviolence in our everyday lives

Bless us with vision to seek alternatives when violence appears as the only solution

Encourage us to look deeply at our own complicity that allows violence to continue in our own hearts and in our world

Bless us with the tenacity to stay committed to the struggle to shape a more peaceful, nonviolent world for all your people

Grant us the strength and courage, we pray, for a radical transformation of own lives and a deeper realization of your Kingdom among us. Amen
A PLACE CALLED HOME

FINLANDIA
Jean Sibelius, 1865–1957
Words and Arr. Michael Joncas

1. A place called home with comfort for the weary;
a place called home of nourishment and rest;
where one unknown becomes a welcome guest,
where love can find a human habitation;
God grant us all this grace: a place called home.

2. A place called home where tenderness can flourish;
a place called home, a haven from all harm;
where hurts are healed, a shelter from the storm,
where peace can find a human habitation;
God grant us all this grace: a place called home.

3. A place called home, a promise for tomorrow;
a place called home, a vision handed down;
where love prevails and peace is ever found,
where hope can find a human habitation;
God grant us all this grace: a place called home.

4. A place called home for every human being;
a place called home where arms are opened wide;
where none are lost, alone or cast aside,
but members of a single human family;
God grant us grace to build a place called home.
After a closing song of peace, all are invited to offer each other a sign of peace.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZvkBg01vHs

https://www.giamusic.com/account and select the Downloadable Items tab

Parts of this prayer are from NCR and John Dear (https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/prayer-intl-nonviolence-day) and the Mennonite Central Committee Canada (http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/14566) and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (https://www.sistersofmercy.org/resources/spirituality/prayer/social-justice-prayers/)
Prayer of Mercy’s Critical Concerns

Nonviolence and Anti-Racism

Opening Prayer
**Leader:** O God of Compassion and Peace bless us with an awareness of your presence with us as we gather together in this space.

**All:** O Compassionate, peaceful God, we are grateful for your presence and ask to be open and receptive to your call to be nonviolent.

Introduction
Our country and our world cry out in grief, anger, and bewilderment at the display of racism, white supremacy and violence in Charlottesville, Virginia and the multiple threats and acts of violence in other corners of the world. Our hearts and prayers go out to the families and friends affected by the deaths of Heather Heyer and two police officers, Lieutenant H. Jay Cullen and Trooper-Pilot Berke M. Bates, and the many people injured. Tragedies like this one continue to spotlight our society's institutionalized structural racism. While this latest incident has caught the attention of our nation, we know that every day people of color in this country feel threatened by its impact.

Reading:
Literature has often spoken of dreams.

  Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently shared his dream in his famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963;

  Langston Hughes in his poem, “A Dream Deferred” asks what happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up or does it explode?

A segregated educational system left many desiring a quality education but their dreams were deferred. Even when schools gradually became desegregated, inequalities were still glaring.
The young, who held dreams of an education in a system free of racial slurs and taunts where they did not have to fear for her life, still had an unrealized dream as they were met with hatred.

Most of us will never have to face the humiliating situations and staggering injustices borne by our sisters and brothers of color. And let us not think that this is a thing of the past. Consider the recent tragedy in Charlottesville, Virginia. The display of racism, white supremacy, and violence fills us with grief, anger, and bewilderment. Racism today often expresses itself in more subtle ways that are just as insidious.

Sisters of Mercy share many dreams about our future together. One such dream is our desire to address “the unrecognized and unreconciled racism” present in our own systems and structures. If we are serious about this challenge, then we must work to make this dream a reality. We are called to examine our own prejudices and discriminatory actions but our task is much deeper. We must look seriously at our own institutional racism and acknowledge our own complicity both individually and communally in oppressive systems and structures.

The dream cannot be deferred any longer. The injustice cannot continue. Holding each other in compassion and prayer we move forward on our journey together.

**Reflection:** Have you ever had to defer a dream? What did it feel like to experience? Was there fear connected to this experience in any way? Have you ever been the object of hatred, prejudice or discrimination? What were the circumstances and how did you respond? Have you ever been aware of issues of racism or witnessed the effects of institutional racism?
**Sharing:** Each one is invited to share his/her reflections on racism. Be conscious of not just looking at personal prejudice and discrimination. Delve deeper into the institutional racism which affects us all. Look at ways in which you may be benefiting from this structure at the expense of people of color. What actions can I take to move against the evil of racism in my own life, my community, or my ministry.

**Possible Actions:**
- Read and study to better understand the difference between prejudice or discrimination and racism.
- If you are a Sister of Mercy or Mercy Associate, attend a racism workshop offered by the Institute Anti-Racism Transformation Team.
- Be aware of stereotypes and work against being influenced by them.
- Be conscious of ways in which people of color are presented in the media. If the depiction is unfavorable, consider contacting the TV station, the advertiser or the company responsible to register your disfavor.
- Do not engage in racist jokes or stories. If you are present when this occurs, try addressing it in a way that does not escalate conflict but that speaks to your personal experience which may differ from that of those sharing the story. Be careful not to make a judgment or say anything dismissive of the person telling the story.
- **Other...**
Closing Prayer:
Leader: O God, of Mercy and Compassion, open our heart to your grace. We ask You to:

All
- Bless us with courage to embrace nonviolence in our everyday lives
- Bless us with vision to seek alternatives when violence appears as the only solution
- Encourage us to look deeply at our own complicity that allows violence to continue in our own hearts and in our world
- Bless us with insight to see the roots of violence inherent in Mercy’s Critical Concerns
- Bless us with the tenacity to stay committed to the struggle to shape a more peaceful, nonviolent world for all your people

O good and gracious God, source of all life, all creation is charged with your Divine Energy. Grant us the strength and courage, we pray, for a radical transformation of own lives and a deeper realization of your Kin-dom among us. Amen

Song
This little light of mine Everywhere I go, I’m gonna let it shine...
I’m gonna let it shine Hide it under a bushel? NO!...
This little light of mine This little light of mine....
I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine